**Variants due to Graphical Similarity Evidencing a Bisection of 1QIsaa**

1QIsaa was one of the first scrolls discovered at Qumran. For this reason, and also because of its relative antiquity and the fact that it includes an almost-complete biblical work, 1QIsaa is one of the most-studied Dead Sea scrolls. One of the key questions that have been studied – the question which I shall discuss presently – is the scroll’s dichotomy; in other words: can we distinguish clearly between its two main parts: columns 1-27 (Isaiah/chapters 1-33) and columns 28-54 (Isaiah/chapters 33-66)? Most of the scholars who have studied the scroll distinguished between the two sections, first and foremost in light of a three-line gap at the end of column 27 – a unique occurrence which may be intended to demarcate two distinct sections of the scroll. According to Abegg, the width of the leather parchments at the end of each section supports the view that there is indeed a distinction between them. These parchments are narrower than the other parchments in the scroll – each one of them is wide enough for two columns only (columns 26-27 appear on one, and 53-54 on the second). Moreover, columns 27 and 28 are narrower than the other columns in the scroll, which could indicate the scribe’s intent to conclude the first section of the scroll at the end of column 27.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The scroll’s text also supports the distinction between the two parts: first, the spelling conventions used in each of the two parts differ from one another. Although the change is gradual, and does not begin sharply in column 28, an in-depth look at the entire scroll reveals a growing tendency to use complete spelling in its second half. Martin, for instance, has pointed out that the word כל is spelled out fully only 90% of the time in the first half of the scroll, versus 100% of the time in its second half. In the case of the word כי this trend becomes more obvious: only 20% of the appearances of the word are spelled fully in the first half, versus 100% of the appearances in the second half.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Gisse offered additional evidence of the dichotomy hypothesis by looking at the frequency of omission of primary letters from words in the scroll (primary letters are letters that function as a necessary part of the lexical form of the word: letters that are part of the root of a verb or the lexical value of a noun), as well as the frequency of omission of guttural letters and haplographies. His findings indicate that these corrections are relatively more common in the first half of the scroll than in the second. He therefore concluded that the scribe drew on two different manuscripts when writing the scroll, one of which included Isaiah 1-33, and the other Isaiah 33-66. The first manuscript was apparently less clear or precise, and as a result, some of the errors were either inadvertently copied from it or resulted from its lack of clarity.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Some scholars have also opposed the distinction between the two sections of the scroll. First, the consistent handwriting throughout the entire scroll led many to discount the hypothesis that it was written by two different scribes. Martin, for instance, examined the handwriting and concluded that the only inconsistencies are minor, when comparing specific columns. These inconsistencies appear naturally when transcribing such a long scroll, which is a lengthy process that is influenced by the scribe’s present condition and the writing tools available to him.[[4]](#footnote-4) Kutcher and Polikotil completely opposed the distinction between the two sections, and not just the claim that it was written by two different people. They explained orthographic differences as an inconsistency that was the result of a change in the scribe’s writing style, claiming that his adoption of the complete spelling convention was concurrent with the ongoing project of copying the scroll.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In this talk I intend to offer more evidence for the dichotomy hypothesis by examining the relative frequency of variants due to graphical similarity in each section. I will show that relatively speaking, these differences are considerably more common in the first section of the scroll than in the second, which is consistent with Gissa’s findings presented above.

At the outset, I'd like to define precisely what I mean by the term “variants to due graphical similarity”, which I am using as proof of the distinction. Interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity were identified at the earliest stage of biblical textual criticism. This type of error was committed unintentionally by a scribe who misidentified a letter as he was transcribing a scroll, accidentally replacing it with a letter that was graphically similar. This type of error can occur under various circumstances: sometimes the shape of the letters in Paleo-Hebrew or square script is so similar that they are virtually indistinguishable, requiring the scribe to consider the context when determining which one to use. Other times, letters share one or more characteristic, so that any change or minor damage to the scroll can result in an interchange.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Most prominent among interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity, when comparing the Masoretic text (MT) and 1QIsaa, are the pairs *vav-yod*, *bet-mem*, and *mem-nun*. In addition to the graphical similarity within these pairs, they also represent similar phonetic sounds, and/or a semantic similarity when the letter appears a prefix (in the case of bet and mem) or as part of a suffix (in the case of mem and nun). The letters *vav* and *yod* could be substituted for one another due to a change in their roles as *matres lectionis*. In cases in which these letters are substituted for one another, it is hard – sometimes impossible – to determine the cause. Nonetheless, I chose to include these cases within the category of interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity that I will discuss shortly, because I believe that the graphical similarity between the letters contributed to their substitution for one another, along with the other causes I have mentioned. Based on a similar theory advanced by Tov in reference to the Septuagint, I would like to make the claim – as I did extensively in an article in Textus 27 – that each of the secondary versions in these cases emerged first and foremost due to the difficulty in identifying letters that are graphically similar to one another.[[7]](#footnote-7) These circumstances would require the scribe to identify the letter based on his own paleographic interpretation, requiring him to take the context into account. In these cases, the scribe needs to make an intuitive decision, which is subjective by nature, based on the phonetic and semantic background that he is familiar with. Thus, although the phonetic similarity between the consonants or the semantic similarity between the prepositions that the letters represent can serve as a basis for generating new versions, the primary source of these differences is the graphical similarity between the letters, which initially generates an uncertain identification on the part of the scribe.

I will demonstrate this general claim by means of an example of an interchange between the letters *vav* and *yod* in the book of Isaiah, in the spelling of the name “Ariel” in the MT. In each of the five appearances of the name (all of them in chapter 29), the MT uses the spelling “אריאל” whereas 1QIsaa uses ארואל (slide). Bigel and Kutcher offered a linguistic explanation for the discrepancy, proposing that it is the result of separate orthographic traditions that represent different linguistic traditions – in the Masoretic tradition the vowel *ī* is used to link the syllables that comprise a name, while the scribe who wrote 1QIsaa belonged to a tradition that used the vowel *ū.[[8]](#footnote-8)* By the way, a similar orthographic discrepancy between variants of the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) has also been documented, where the SP seems to be situated within the same tradition as the scroll: In Genesis 32:31, the MT uses אשריאל whereas the SP uses אשרואל (slide). All of these names are theophoric, including within them the component *el*, together with the vowel *ī* in the MT and *ū* in 1QIsaa as well as the SP. Indeed, it may be that the discrepancy is due to the use of a different vowel sound. However, the interchange between the letters *vav* and *yod* in this case may also be due to the graphical similarity between them. These letters have been similarly shaped in block script since Hasmonaean times, and they became more and more similar to the point where they are virtually indistinguishable in some Qumran scrolls (slide).

An examination of Herodian scrolls reveals how easy it can be to confuse the letters. We see this, for instance, in the words בוגדים and בגויים, in Pesher Habakkuk and 11QPsa, respectively, in which the letters appear beside one another. In Pesher Habakkuk, the *vav*’s “leg” is just marginally longer than the yod’s leg and the difference between them is hardly noticeable. In the word בגוים in 11QPsa, the letters are identical so that there is absolutely no graphic difference between the *vav* and the two *yod*s alongside it:[[9]](#footnote-9)

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|  |  |
| 'בוגדים' בפשר חבקוק  (עמודה 5, שורה 8)[[10]](#footnote-10) | 'בגויים' ב-11QPsa  (עמודה 4, שורה 11)[[11]](#footnote-11) |

These letters were almost identical in shape for a very long time, up until the first century, when they grew different from one another once again, distinguished by the length of their leg – the *vav* with a long leg and the *yod* with a shorter one.

Without rejecting the suggestions presented above, I wish to make the claim that the graphic element is connected to this distinction; that it is interwoven with the morphological one: The scribe was uncertain with regards to the letter before him, and could not determine whether it was a *vav* or a *yod*, which led him to decide according to the orthographic tradition known to him. If this is indeed the case, then the graphical similarity underlies the emergence of the different versions.

We shall now examine the number of instances in which there are variants due to graphical similarity throughout the scroll and see that they point to a distinction between its two parts. In the slide before us, you can see the distribution of the variants due to graphical similarity when comparing the book of Isaiah according to the MT and 1QIsaa, by column (slide).

Altogether, there are 158 variants due to graphical similarity when comparing the book of Isaiah in the MT and its corresponding version in 1QIsaa. In the first half of the scroll there are 103 such variants, and only 55 in the second half. On average, there are 3.8 variants per column in the first half, and only 2 per column in the second half. Hence, there is a significant difference in the frequency of variants due to graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll: they appear in the first half at double the rate than in the second half.

(slide graphs) In the following slide the data is presented graphically, demonstrating the disparity in the frequency of the differences throughout the scroll. If we momentarily ignore column 40, which has an unusually high number of interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity compared to the rest of the second half of the scroll, the difference between the parts becomes even more apparent.

Now let us examine the data before us, in relation to the data compiled by Gisse on the high frequency of omissions of primary letters, gutturals and haplographies in the first half of the scroll, compared to its second half. Does the disparity in the number of interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll support Gisse’s hypothesis that the scroll was in fact copied from two different manuscripts, the first of which was less precise than the second, which was of better quality?

To show the connections between my findings and Gisse’s findings, we must assume that, when it comes to variants due to graphical similarity, all versions of the MT are more reliable, whereas all of the versions of the scroll are secondary. Indeed, Boreas made the sweeping claim that the MT is more reliable than 1QIsaa, in all instances of variants due to graphical similarity between letters.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, Boreas made a similar claim regarding most of the other discrepancies between the MT and 1QIsaa, and he seems to have been influenced by the diminished textual value associated with the scroll in the first years after its discovery. Indeed, the assumption that the variants in 1QIsaa were the result of errors on the part of the scribe was common among scholars in the first years in which it was studied. This approach attributed any inaccuracies to the scribe who copied 1QIsaa and characterized him as an unskilled novice. In addition to Boreas, this was also the opinion of Brownly and Orlinsky. In a series of publications dating from 1950 onwards, Orlinsky resisted attempts to reconstruct the original text with the aid of the scrolls. He argued that any differences between the scroll and the MT were due to imprecision on the part of the scribe.[[13]](#footnote-13) Although later scholars recognized the possibility of interpretative variations, they also attributed many variants in the scroll to unintentional errors by the scribe.[[14]](#footnote-14) The prevailing view of the scroll’s version of the text as inferior became less pervasive as study of it advanced. On several occasions, Talmon criticized the extreme skepticism expressed by some scholars towards the scroll and called for it to be reevaluated.[[15]](#footnote-15) Nonetheless, the skeptical view that holds the scroll in low regard, with little textual value, is still ubiquitous among researchers today.[[16]](#footnote-16)

All this having been said, in order to examine the connection between the findings I presented above and Gisse’s findings, the variants due to graphical similarity between the MT and 1QIsaa must be evaluated in a balanced fashion, and in each case, the superior version must be determined. I have therefore divided the differences into four categories:

1. Cases in which the MT’s version is primary and the scroll’s secondary (A): (slide with examples) Included in this category are clear-cut cases in which the scroll’s version is etymologically unacceptable, such as “בל תלב בו” in Isaiah 33, 21 as opposed to “בל תלך בו” in the MT; “מדבר בעדקה” in Isaiah 63,1 vs “מדבר בצדקה” in the MT. Similarly, there are cases in which the scroll’s version does not match the context, such as Isaiah 49, 10: “'לֹא יִרְעָבוּ וְלֹא יִצְמָאוּ וְלֹא־יַכֵּם **שָׁרָב** וָשָׁמֶשׁ כִּי־מְרַחֲמָם יְנַהֲגֵם וְעַל־מַבּוּעֵי מַיִם יְנַהֲלֵם” in the MT vs “ולא יכם שוב” in the scroll. This verse describes people who are returning from exile and assures them that they shall not be afflicted by hunger, thirst, “sharav” – the burning heat of the desert,[[17]](#footnote-17) or the sun. Included in this category are also cases in which the scroll’s version is secondary due to Aramaic influence or the graphical similarity between the letters *mem* and *nun*: (Kutcher) 'ידים'/'ידין' (יג 7); 'לציים'/'לציין' (כג 13); 'שבעים'/'שבעין' (כג 17).
2. Cases in which the scroll’s version is primary and MT’s is secondary (B): An undisputed example of this category appears in Isaiah 14, 4: 'וְנָשָׂאתָ הַמָּשָׁל הַזֶּה עַל־מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל וְאָמָרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׁבַת נֹגֵשׂ שָׁבְתָה **מַדְהֵבָה** (MT)/ מרהבה (1QIsaa).[[18]](#footnote-18) The word מרהבה that appears in the scroll derives from the root רה"ב, which can mean to attack,[[19]](#footnote-19) as opposed to the etymology of the word that appears in the MT, which is unknown to us. There are additional cases in which the scroll’s version is preferable, although there is no consensus among scholars in those cases.
3. Cases in which both versions are etymologically and contextually challenging, so that it is impossible to determine which is preferable (C): For example, in Isaiah 10, 31: 'נָדְדָה **מַדְמֵנָה** יֹשְׁבֵי הַגֵּבִים הֵעִיזוּ' in MT and מרמנה in 1QIsaa. מדמנה/מרמנה is the name of a place near Jerusalem whose inhabitants would leave for fear of the approaching Assyrian army. Neither one of the variants appears a second time in the MT,[[20]](#footnote-20) so that it is impossible to determine the original spelling.
4. Cases in which both versions are etymologically and contextually conceivable, so that it is impossible to determine which is preferable (D): This category includes variants that could be related to a substitution of the letters *yod* and *vav* for one another, and/or uses of perfect and imperfect forms of verbs that do not affect a word’s meaning at all such as ושאג/.ישאג (5, 29) or ובושו/יבושו (19, 9), and uses of different patterns such as אסיר/אסור (10, 4), סיגים/סוגים (1, 22).

In the following slide you can see how the variants due to graphical similarity between the MT and 1QIsaa are distributed across the four categories. (slide)

Although the numbers are somewhat fluid, because determining which version is preferable is subjective by nature, the general picture revealed by our findings is clear. In most of the cases in which a determination is possible, the MT is preferable to the scroll. In these cases, the secondary version in the scroll is the result of the scribe substituting an individual letter for a similar one, or of the existence of a similar variant in one of his sources.

This data points to a direct link between Gisse’s findings and my own. We can now make the general claim that the number of scribal errors in the first half of the scroll is greater than in its second half – regardless of whether these errors are the result of substituting graphically similar letters, or omitting primary or guttural letters, or haplographies. This data could support the hypothesis that the scroll was copied from two different sources: the first half from a manuscript that was textually inferior, and the second half from a manuscript that was of higher quality. This was Gisse’s conclusion from the data he presented in his research, and this is the opinion held by most scholars who took note of the division of the scroll, such as Ulrich and Flint, Brownly, Williamson, Talmon, Lonkaire, Martin, Kahale, and Kook.[[21]](#footnote-21) But I believe that the data I have presented here supports Noth and Tov’s claim that the scroll was copied by two different scribes: one of them copying the first half and the other copying the second.[[22]](#footnote-22) The first scribe’s work is careless and imprecise compared to the work of the second scribe.

To support the theory that the scribe was the one to interchange the letters with graphic similarities, I would like to cite a lecture that Tov gave at Haifa University this past May, entitled “The Scribes of Ancient Israel and their Attitude Towards the Bible: A View from Within the Qumran Scrolls”. Tov dealt with the textual meticulousness of the biblical scribes and addressed the question of whether the variants found in their copies are the result of their own errors, or whether they copied the errors from their source manuscripts. According to Tov, the answer to this question depends on the scribe’s approach: in the case of a meticulous scribe, we can assume that he made an exact copy of the manuscript that lay before him, including any variants. However, if the scribe was careless, it is safe to assume that any imprecisions in the text were his own. The scribe’s approach and how thorough he was in transmitting the text can be measured according to the number of corrections between the lines. I am referring to corrections that the scribe makes to his own work, throughout the process of copying, or after it is complete. We can assume that, if he is meticulous and precise, we will see a small number of corrections, and vice versa.

Tov, who studied the number of textual corrections in 1QIsaa, determined that it reveals a large measure of intervention on the part of the scribe. In other words, the scribe did not copy the text precisely as it appeared in the manuscript before him, which required him to make many corrections in between the lines. If we are indeed dealing with a careless scribe, then although we cannot be certain, it would seem that the interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity in the scroll were the result of errors that were his own, and not errors that existed in the primary versions of the scroll. Together with the quantitative data on the differences in letters bearing graphical similarity, the difference in the frequency of variants when comparing the two parts of the scroll might be viewed as evidence supporting the theory that the two parts were written by two scribes with different levels of expertise.

Moreover, sampling the number of textual corrections between the lines (not including the lengthy additions in the margins) from the first five columns of each part of the scroll reveals a disparity according to this measure of textual meticulousness as well: (slide)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of corrections between the lines** | **Column Number** |
| 10 | 1 |
| 1 | 2 |
| 7 | 3 |
| 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 5 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of corrections between the lines** | **Column Number** |
| 3 | 28 |
| - | 29 |
| 1 | 30 |
| 2 | 31 |
| 1 | 32 |

As you can see, in columns 1-5 there are 24 corrections between the lines, whereas in columns 28-32 there are only 7. That is to say, the extent of the scribe’s intervention changes from section to section – there are three times as many corrections in the first half than in the second. In fact, the disparity may be even greater, given that the first columns of the scroll are partially damaged and some of their text is missing.

I contend that this disparity is no coincidence, and that it should be considered in conjunction with the rest of the evidence presented throughout this lecture. It could support the theory that the scroll was written by two different scribes: the first scribe wrote columns 1-27 and the second scribe wrote columns 28-54. Comparing the two texts written by the two scribes reveals that the first was somewhat careless in his work, which resulted in many errors: omitting primary and guttural letters, haplographies, interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity, and additional letter substitutions that led to a large number of corrections in between the lines. The second scribe, on the other hand, was more meticulous in his work, making fewer mistakes as he copied. As a result, the textual phenomena just listed are far less common in his work.

In summary, there is a disparity in the rate of interchanges of letters bearing graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll. These types of substitutions occur twice as many times in the first half of the scroll than they do in the second. Moreover, in most of the cases in which we can determine which version is preferable, the scroll’s version is secondary to the MT. My findings are consistent with Gisse’s research, which also points to more frequent errors in the first half of the scroll. I believe that the reason for the differences between the two parts is that they were written by different scribes. Tov’s criteria for measuring a scribe’s meticulousness supports my argument. According to his criteria we can point to a different pattern of textual precision in each part of the scroll: there are significantly more corrections in the work of the first scribe than in the work of the second. This data matches the large number of errors by the first scribe that were reviewed in this lecture, compared to a much smaller number of errors by the second scribe.

1. Abegg 2010, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Martin, 1958, pp. 17-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gisse, 1988, pp. 65-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Martin, 1958, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Polikutil, 2001, p. 19. Kutcher, 1959, pp. 451-452. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Henson, Paleography p. 568; Kennedy, correction on page 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bigel, BASOR, p. 178; Dayfani, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yardeni, 1991, p. 156; Henson, 1976, p. 568; Ofer, 2004, p. 69; Cross, 1961, p. 189. Cameron, 1973, discusses the interchanges of vav and yod due to their graphical similarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For a discussion of the scroll’s dating to the 1st century and select bibliography see Nitzan 1986, pp. 128 – 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a dating of the scroll to the Hasmonean period see Sanders, 1965, pp. 7 – 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Boreus, 1945 pp. 25 – 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Orlinsky, 1950, particularly p. 165; Orlinsky 1951; Orlinsky, 1952; Orlinsky 1953; Orlinsky, 1954a; Orlinsky 1954b; Brownly, 1952; Boreus, 1948; Boreus, 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hogenhaven, 1984; Van der Coy, 1981, p. 89; Cf., Politukil; Rosenblum, 1970, p. 81who viewed the scroll as an interpretive text; a copy of the book in language that is accessible to people who are not fluent in Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Talmon, 1975b, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gonslebs, 1992; Tov, 2008, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. HALOT 4:1651 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For a more complete review of the different views and biblical references see Mizrahi 2013b, pp. 433-440. Kutcher לשי"ט agrees that the scroll’s version is superior in this case. Mizrahi, 2013, p. 94 lists the appearances of the word מדהבה in non-biblical Qumran scrolls, which led him to conclude that it was later integrated into Qumranic Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For instance HALOT 2:1192 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. מדמנה appears again in Isaiah 25, 10, not as the name of a place but as a pile of rubbish (דומן) see BDB, 199; HALOT 2:549. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ulrich and Flint 2010, p. 63; Brownly, 1952, p. 20; Gisse, 1988; Williamson, 2012, p. 330; Talmon, 1989, p. 73 onward; Loncair 2013, p. 48; Martin, 1958, p. 65; Kahala, 1951, p. 72 onward; Kook, 1992, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Tov, 2004, p. 21 (confirm); Noth 1951, p. ###. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)